

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 28 JUNE 2018 FROM 7.30 PM TO 8.10 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Charlotte Haitham Taylor (Chairman), Julian McGhee-Sumner, Richard Dolinski, Stuart Munro, Pauline Helliard-Symons, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Simon Weeks and Philip Mirfin

Other Councillors Present

Anthony Pollock
Laura Blumenthal
Gary Cowan
Helen Power
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey
Shahid Younis

11. COUNCILLOR KEITH BAKER

Councillor Charlotte Haitham Taylor announced that Keith Baker had stepped down from his role as Executive Member for Highways and Transport. On behalf of the Executive Councillor Haitham Taylor expressed thanks for Councillor Baker's contribution to the work of the Council in his Executive role over the past six months.

12. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence received.

Following the resignation of Councillor Baker, Councillor Anthony Pollock attended the meeting in his role as Deputy Executive Member for Highways and Transport. In accordance with legislation Councillor Pollock was able to take part in any discussions but was not entitled to vote.

13. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 31 May 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

14. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Norman Jorgensen declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 15 Shareholders' Report by virtue of the fact that his wife was a paid Non-Executive Director of WBC Holdings Ltd. Councillor Jorgensen remained in the meeting during discussions and voted on the matter.

Councillors Pauline Jorgensen and Stuart Munro declared personal interests in Agenda Item 15 Shareholders' Report by virtue of the fact that they were paid Non-Executive Directors of WBC Holdings Ltd. Councillors Jorgensen and Munro remained in the meeting during discussions and voted on the matter.

Councillor Philip Mirfin declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 15 Shareholders' Report by virtue of the fact that he was a paid Non-Executive Director of Optalis Holdings Ltd. Councillor Mirfin remained in the meeting during discussions and voted on the matter.

Councillor Anthony Pollock declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 15 Shareholders' Report by virtue of the fact that he was a paid Non-Executive Director of Optalis Holdings Ltd. Councillor Pollock remained in the meeting during discussions but did not vote on the matter as he was in attendance in his role as a Deputy Executive Member.

15. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Chairman invited members of the public to submit questions to the appropriate Members.

15.1 Keith Malvern asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question

In the Wokingham Paper of the 31st of May the Leader of the Council is quoted as saying 'The residents sent us a clear message on May 3, we have heard that message and are listening to them. If our residents feel they are not being listened to, then we need to redouble our efforts to show that we have taken on board what they have to say.' How is that compatible with the proposals to take away the remaining school crossing patrollers despite a petition with more than 200 signatures including those from two new Councillors elected on the 3rd of May?

Answer

The petition is due to be debated at full Council in July to ensure that the issues raised in the consultation and the concerns raised by residents are listened to. Following this a report will be considered by the Executive on 26 July. I would stress that until the petition has been properly debated and the report has been to the Executive, we are still considering the matter. That is the transparent and honest way to deal with these issues and is consistent with our commitment to demonstrate to residents that we have taken on board their views when we are making decisions.

Supplementary Question

There is a published intention to construct some crossings, be they zebra crossings, pelican crossings or puffin crossings (perhaps albatross might be more appropriate). That is in the public domain. I was also led to understand that issues relating to redundancy were on the cards. Have these been put on hold and is it the intention to carry on with these crossings?

Supplementary Answer

As I said, we are taking a pause and the costs that you have in the paper front of you are not entirely accurate. The Executive report will give fuller detail and I am sure that you will come along to listen to the debate. In relation to the proposed redundancies, they are subject to consultation at the moment, which is going on longer than was originally proposed.

15.2 Tahir Maher asked the Executive Member for Environment, Leisure and Libraries the following question:

Before the recent council elections, I asked a question about an unnecessary suggestion that the much used Maiden Erlegh library may close. At this Executive, I was informed that the decision was to be held back until June (after the local elections). I ask the Executive and the Council again what is being done to ensure that the much used Maiden Erlegh library is kept open.

Answer

The response to the previous question stated that the decision to end the Council's use of the Maiden Erlegh School site library was taken by Maiden Erlegh School in February 2018 in accordance with the lease arrangements that have been in place for 34 years.

Prior to this the school requested that the Council change the opening hours of the library to be after the end of the school day. This the Council did from 2 January 2018. It was disappointing, therefore, that only a few weeks later the school terminated our lease, closing the library.

In response to your previous supplementary question, I said we intended to bring a paper to the June Executive on our library service and the impact of closing the Maiden Erlegh library. There is a paper at this evening's meeting explaining how the Council continues to meet its statutory obligations to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for the residents of Wokingham Borough.

The assessment shows that the Council has been successful in providing an increasingly well-used library service for the people who live, work and visit the Borough. The closure of the Maiden Erlegh Library is likely to have only a small impact on residents' ability to access library services due to the close proximity of alternative libraries that are open for substantially longer hours each week.

Finally just to repeat – the decision to close the library was taken by Maiden Erlegh School not me.

Supplementary Question

There will be locations within Maiden Erlegh where the library could be relocated. The Council is spending a huge amount of money redeveloping Wokingham town centre. Surely, we could spend a few hundred thousand on a much needed library for the local community?

Supplementary Answer

Again, just to repeat, it was the school that closed the library, not us. We had no desire to close the library, so you should direct your ire to the school rather than us.

The Lower Earley library is less than a mile away and the Woodley library is about 2.5 miles away, so there are other libraries that serve the area that people can get to. When we started our assessment of the people who use this library we were concerned that there might be a number of vulnerable people who could not get to other libraries. There are 6 pensioners who use the Maiden Erlegh library and no other library. Our library staff are focussing on people like this to assess whether they can still access services.

The vast majority of people who only use the Maiden Erlegh library (there are 171 of them) are pupils of the school and their immediate families, so it is a school issue rather than a community issue. We have been doing lots over the years to increase the footfall in our libraries and have been very successful in doing that. The strategy we have for libraries is working compared to other boroughs where usage of libraries is dropping. We do everything we can to encourage people to use our libraries.

16. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Chairman invited Members to submit questions to the appropriate Members

16.1 Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Business, Economic Development and Strategic Planning the following question:

Re: IMD 2018/28 Duty to Cooperate: SHMA Methodology, Executive - Individual Member Decisions - Monday, 9th July, 2018 3.00 pm

As this IMD has serious implications for Wokingham and its residents I am very surprised to see it "hidden" in an IMD.

Can you therefore give me an update on it as it is scheduled to be determined in 10 days' time?

Answer

Legislation requires Councils to work together to ensure strategic issues, which cut across local authority boundaries, are properly addressed. I am sure that you know this from your work in this area. With regards to housing, Councils are required in government policy and guidance to identify Housing Market Areas (HMA). These are functional areas which have a relationship in terms of house prices, migration and commuting patterns.

At present this Council, and the other Berkshire local authorities, rely on the Berkshire (including South Bucks) Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) as the most up-to-date assessment of housing issues. This identifies two HMAs relevant to the Berkshire local authorities – a Western Berkshire HMA focused on Reading (which includes Wokingham Borough, West Berkshire, and Bracknell Forest in addition to Reading), and an Eastern Berkshire HMA focused on Slough (which includes RBWM and South Bucks in addition to Slough). The identified HMAs were subject to public consultation in 2015 as part of the study's preparation.

To assist local plan processes across Berkshire, each of the Berkshire local authorities has been asked to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) confirming their continued agreement with the HMA geography. The MoU is not legally binding, but provides a transparent way of recording a working agreement. It can be reviewed at any time.

The MoU does not consider housing numbers. On this we expect the government to introduce a standardised methodology for calculating housing need across England shortly. This will supersede any previous calculation.

The signing of the MoU does not have serious implications for Wokingham Borough and it is certainly not hidden. The MoU simply reflects the facts of how places in Berkshire relate to each other as recommended in a study which has been in the public domain since 2015 and was widely consulted on.

I am due to consider a report on the MoU at a public meeting on 12 July 2018. The report and details of the meeting will be available in the normal way on our website.

Supplementary Question

In relation to my point about information being hidden in IMDs. For example, the Leader of the Council signed an IMD on 4 June which was in your name. The IMD report took a line on supporting SDL building using volume builders as opposed to small and medium sized local builders. I would add that the response to Government was, generally speaking, excellent, but with regard to IMDs why was this crucial Government consultation not part of

a residents' consultation or, for that matter, brought to Council to allow Members to debate it in full and not have it buried in an IMD?

Supplementary Answer

I was aware of the particular consultation you mentioned (Revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework), read the report and talked to Officers about it. We are waiting to receive a response.

That particular IMD would have originally been signed by Councillor David Lee who was leading on that activity, but, as you are aware, he lost his seat, so the Leader signed the IMD. It was important that we got across our thoughts for the Government to consider and they are telling us that they will respond before the summer recess. It is important for us to say whether we agree or not with what they are suggesting.

Of course, Members and the public are able to attend these IMD meetings if they wish and are able to make a contribution.

16.2 Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

There are complaints about OTT Parking enforcement (CPE) at Dinton Pastures for parents dropping off/picking up their children attending scout functions at the Dinton Activity centre. They are not being given 10 minutes to do so. Winnersh 1st Scouts are paying WBC about £6000 a year for use of the building. Why can't some leeway be given?

Answer

Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) visits generally occur twice daily at the Council Country Parks, once in the morning and once in the evening. In order to establish whether a car has been parked on site for more than the 10 minute grace period, our inspectors routinely take down the registration numbers when they arrive at the site. This appears to have given the impression to a number of parents recently that they were being targeted for parking tickets which was not the case. As far as WBC are aware no parents dropping or picking up their children from Scouts have received parking tickets where they have been parked on the site for less than 10 minutes.

Supplementary Question

The scouts are having problems in attracting adult volunteers because they have to pay for parking in addition to volunteering their time. Since this volunteering is, in effect, a free service which the Council is not paying for, can anything be done to give these volunteers free parking, for example by providing stickers for the time they are volunteering at the Scouts Centre?

Supplementary Answer

I will provide a written response to your supplementary question.

16.3 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

We have recently had a consultation on School Crossing Patrollers, but I do not see when the results will be published? We had the same situation, last year, when we lost several School Crossing Patrollers, but I cannot see that a report was issued containing the results and the responses from the Council.

In the interests of transparency, when will these results be publicly available?

Answer

The Safe School Crossing Patrol consultation report is available on the council's website at www.wokingham.gov.uk/consultations. It is in the Finished Consultations section.

Supplementary Question

There is also a consultation on the Council Budget and we don't appear to have the results of that either?

Supplementary Answer

I cannot comment on consultations outside my remit.

Councillor Haitham Taylor stated that a written response would be provided in relation to the Budget consultation issue.

16.4 Carl Doran asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question. Due to his inability to attend the meeting a written reply was provided.

Can the Executive Member for Highways please supply a list of road traffic accidents that have occurred on the A4 London Road in Earley, over the last two years?

Answer

There have been 7 collisions during the period 1st March 2016 – 28th Feb 2018 along the London Road in Earley, from its junction with Sutton Seeds Roundabout up to Bath Road, including Shepherd Hill roundabout/gyratory.

Records indicate that these have been either rear end shunts or as a result of drivers failing to look, or give way at the roundabouts. There are no engineering solutions that could be put in place to address this driver behaviour.

16.5 Helen Power asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

I was contacted by a resident regarding a pointless sign recently erected on the Finchampstead Road by the Russley Green junction. I discovered that this sign, along with five others in the Borough, were requested by David Lee, when he was Executive Member for Strategic Highways. They were erected to inform motorists that new roads are being constructed and apparently this also gives a reason why motorists might feel their journey times are increasing due to the roadworks. The signs cost around £430 each, but that doesn't include the installation costs which are likely to be higher than the cost of each sign.

How is it that an Executive Member can get away with this sort of extra expense when the same money would have paid for a school crossing patroller for a year?

Answer

The signs referred to are part of a comprehensive communications plan that aims to increase the flow of information to residents about roadworks, highways improvements and wider transport issues. Part of the plan is to increase awareness of the new roads being built in the borough in order to counter the misconception that new housing is being built without the necessary infrastructure – when in fact we are making what must be one of the largest investments in infrastructure the Borough has seen, with more than £100million allocated for new roads alone. The signs are one of the ways we are

increasing knowledge about the five major roads that are being built to mitigate the impact of new housing and improve the network.

You may also have noticed that we have significantly increased the volume and quality of our text, email and social media updates to keep people informed about road closures and other disruption – in order to help people plan journeys. We have also increased our promotion of non-car means of transport and will be increasing our efforts as the communication plan is further developed.

In relation to the school crossing patrollers, the signs were paid for from capital budget, which could not be used for revenue costs such as school crossing patrollers.

Supplementary Question

This question relates to one person making a financial decision which residents across the Borough think is a waste of money. Will you listen to residents and use their Council Tax to continue to provide services that they want and value, such as school crossing patrollers, rather than frivolous projects such as these signs?

Supplementary Answer

In relation to the issue about spending money on things that residents value, of course that is something we do all the time.

17. SHAREHOLDERS' REPORT

(Councillors Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Philip Mirfin, Stuart Munro and Anthony Pollock declared personal interests in this item)

The Executive considered a report which provided the budget monitoring position and the operational update for the Council Owned Companies for the period ending 30 April 2018. The report gave details of progress relating to the Council's housing subsidiaries and Optalis which was the provider of choice for Adult Care services.

The Executive Member for Finance and Corporate Services went through the report and responded to Member questions.

In relation to the completion of the Fosters project it was confirmed that residents were now settled in their new homes and were happy with the facilities provided.

In relation to the operation of Optalis, it was confirmed that over the past seven years Optalis had delivered savings to the Council in the region of £6m.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the budget monitoring position for the month ending 30 April 2018 be noted;
- 2) the operational update for the period to 30 April 2018 be noted.

18. COMPREHENSIVE AND EFFICIENT LIBRARY SERVICE

The Executive considered a report which set out the proposed arrangements for mitigating the impact on the Council and its statutory requirements for the provision of Library Services following notice being served by the Maiden Erlegh School to vacate the Maiden Erlegh School library site.

The Executive Member for Environment, Leisure and Libraries advised the meeting that the Council was continuing to meet its statutory duties to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all the residents of the Borough. Following the establishment of the Library Offer in 2016 the Council had implemented self-service in six libraries (with a 50% take-up), relocated the Arborfield library and provided an extra 17 hours of opening time across the Borough. The Council would also be opening new libraries in Shinfield and Arborfield as part of the Strategic Development Locations.

In relation to the closure of the Maiden Erlegh library, it was considered that most of the current service users would be able to relocate to nearby libraries as many residents already used more than one of the Borough's libraries. Residents unable to travel could be served by other means such as the Library home delivery service.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) arrangements to mitigate the impact on the Council and its statutory requirements for the provision of Library services following notice being served by the Maiden Erlegh School to vacate the Maiden Erlegh School library site, as set out in the report, be approved;
- 2) the book purchasing and staffing resource be redeployed across the remaining library sites.

19. WOKINGHAM PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES STRATEGY 2018

The Executive considered a report setting out a Primary School Places Strategy for the period 2018-2028 which includes proposed actions to ensure that there were sufficient primary school places in the right areas to serve Wokingham Borough's growing communities, outside of the strategic development location associated areas.

The Executive Member for Children's Services informed the Executive that a key element of the new strategy was flexibility. This meant that the Council would be able to respond to fluctuations in demand for school places and ensure that enough places were provided in the right locations across the Borough. The strategy examined the need for additional school places in the short term (3 years), the medium term (5 years) and the long term (10 years). The medium and long term projections indicated the need for additional school places linked to the provision of new housing.

The strategy had been developed using a more scientific approach which meant more effective analysis of data on demand for school places. This meant that problems experienced in earlier years, when quick fixes had to be put in place, would not be repeated.

RESOLVED: That the Wokingham Borough Council Primary School Places Strategy 2018 to 2028 be adopted.